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ABSTRACT

A study sought to apply the Navy's Academic Remedial Training (ART) program to illiterate adults by concentrating on intensive reading instruction. Administrators from the City of Memphis selected 16 participants based on employee interest and need. They were primarily middle-aged, black males with four years of education who earned between $14,000 and $18,000 per year. The learners also brought a sense of past failure in school to their classes. The learners participated in the program for 10 days over a period of 2 weeks, spending the whole day in learning activities. The program used a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to reading instruction. Following testing, instructors used methods such as assisted reading, oral and silent reading, small group reading, and mini-lessons. Many reading skills were taught using the "Detecting the Sequence" materials from Barnell Loft, Ltd. and community-based materials such as newspapers. Five volunteers made up the staff; all were veteran teachers or Navy-trained instructors. Standardized instruments, interviews, questionnaires, and observation were used to evaluate the program. Some of the findings were that (1) learners had physiological disorders that interferred with learning; (2) the learners had a short attention span; (3) learning materials must be selected carefully; (4) instructional personnel must foster independence in learners; and (5) adult learners became mutually helpful, gained self-esteem, and expressed a desire for further education. The study concluded that the Reading Improvement Program can be adapted for older civilian learners and that further tests should be made. (KC)

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Memphis - Project Literacy U.S. (M-PLUS)
Reading Improvement Program

ED284995

REPORT NO. 87-1

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MEMPHIS - PROJECT LITERACY U.S. (M-PLUS)

Reading Improvement Program

prepared for

Memphis Literacy Coalition

and

Naval Technical Training Command
Naval Air Station Memphis
Millington, TN 38054-5056

by

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March, 1987

INTRODUCTION

> More than 23 million adults in America cannot read or write well enough to perform the common tasks of everyday life. . . . Another 35 million are semi-literate with basic skill levels below the 8th grade level. (1)

These statistics emphasize a national problem of adult literacy. James Duffy, an executive of ABC, when announcing a joint service project of Capital Cities/ABC Inc. and the Public Broadcasting Service entitled PLUS: Project Literacy U.S., called for an attack on the adult illiteracy problem. PLUS consisted of two phases: outreach and awareness. The outreach phase was designed to stimulate and mobilize local initiatives toward the problem, while the awareness phase was designed to raise national concern for the problem. (2)

A local task force or literacy coalition grew from the work of WHBQ-TV, WKNO-TV, and The Commercial Appeal. This coalition, under the direction of Chairman, Rear Admiral David L. Harlow, is seeking new ways to expand existing literacy delivery systems to reach greater numbers of adults in Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee who can benefit from literacy programs.

Statement of the Problem

Illiteracy is a significant problem throughout Tennessee. Congressman Jim Cooper's Legislative Task Force defined literacy as the "level of skills necessary to be employable in today's world." The task force also stated that "the possession of a high school education or equivalent is widely assumed today to be the minimum level of education required for most individuals to be eligible for most jobs." (3)

How great is the problem of illiteracy in Tennessee using Cooper's task force's definition of literacy? According to the 1980 census, there were some 2.6 million adults over 25 years of age in the state with twenty seven percent (702,000) of them not having a high school diploma. In the Memphis area, 148,026 individuals over 25 years of age could use literacy training. (4) However, it should be pointed out that when adult is defined as 16 years of age or over, the need for literacy training becomes even greater. These figures do not include individuals who have been given a high school diploma, but who are woefully lacking in literacy skills and who cannot perform on the job because of this deficiency.

Purpose of the Study

This study, using individuals who had less than a high school education, sought to address adult literacy by focusing on the reading aspect of the problem. Specifically, the purpose of this program was to answer the following questions:

1. Can the Navy's Academic Remedial Training (ART) program of intensive reading training be modified to obtain similar results with adults from the community as compared to results obtained from young, Navy recruits? Navy recruits are administered a reading test on their first processing day at recruit training. If they score at 6.0 reading grade level or below, they are assigned to ART for reading remediation. The ART program has been able to raise the reading grade level of Navy recruits approximately 2.3 grade levels in about seventeen days.

2. Can a program of intensive reading instruction be used to motivate adults to continue their learning by returning to school to pursue a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate?

3. Will the reading improvement program have a positive effect on the self-esteem of participating learners?

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Reading Improvement Program is discussed in terms of: (1) participant selection, (2) training schedule, organization and facilities, (3) instructional methodology, (4) reading skills taught, (5) instructional materials utilized, (6) staffing, and (7) program evaluation.

1. Participant Selection

Administrators from the City of Memphis selected the participants based on employee interest and need. Although the program originally called for testing a population to obtain a sample of twenty people who read between the 3.0 and 5.9 grade levels, this testing was abandoned when only 16 individuals were present at the informational meeting. All sixteen participants were accepted into the program because a commitment had been made to test the reading improvement program using approximately twenty people. Another important factor in the decision to accept all 16 people regardless of their reading grade level was that these people were volunteers who wanted to help test the intensive training concept and who were willing to take a risk with the pilot program.

Demographically, the participants can be characterized as middle aged, black males with 4 years of education who earn between $14,000 and $17,999 per year. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by sex, age, years of schooling, and income level.

Psychologically, the learners brought a sense of past failure in school to their classes. Even though their oral language skills were fairly well developed, they could not function well in a print-oriented world. Each of the learners was employed and had confidence about his ability to function on the job, but when it came to the classroom environment

TABLE 1

Participant Demographic Data

Age Distribution in years	
34	
36	
40	
42	
45	
46	
49	(2)
51	(2)
52	
53	
54	
57	(2)
63	

Mean Age = 48.6 years

Marital Status	
Married	10
Single	1
Divorced/ widowed	5

Years of Schooling	
1 year	(2)
2 years	(1)
3 years	(1)
4 years	(4)
5 years	(1)
6 years	(3)
7 years	(2)
8 years	(1)

Mean Years Schooling - 4.25

Income Level	
$5,000 - $8,999	(3)
9,000 - 13,999	(4)
14,000 - 17,999	(9)
18,000 - up	(0)

Sex	
Males	(14)
Females	(2)

uncertainty manifested itself. Thus, each learner needed constant feedback and daily information about any progress that was being made.

2. Training Schedule, Organization and Facilities

The length of the program was ten calendar days using six and one-half hours per day for instruction. Total instructional time was 65 hours; however, the actual hours of teaching were 58 because some time was lost the first morning with a delay in arrival and with an awards ceremony on the final day. (Each participant was given a certificate at the awards ceremony on the final day.)

The learners arrived at the Memphis Naval Air Station at 7:00 a.m. each morning and went directly to the galley for breakfast. After breakfast, classes were conducted until 12:15 p.m. when the learners took one hour and fifteen minutes for lunch. Following lunch, classes were conducted from 1:30 p.m. until 3:45 p.m.

The learners were given a reading test on the first day of the program. The test results indicated that there were three instructional groups. One group read between the 2.8 and 4.5 grade levels and needed reading for understanding. The second group knew the alphabet and sounds but needed instruction in phonetic and structural analysis as well as reading simple sentences. The third group did not know the alphabet and its attendant sounds; they required instruction in letters, sounds, and word development.

The three classrooms were ample sized with good overhead lighting which is essential for adults learners. The chalkboards were green creating a white-on-green combination which is hard for some people to read . All classrooms were on the ground floor providing ease of access and restroom facilities were adjacent to them.

It can be said that the training schedule was ambitious because it had numerous educational activities that were organized to maximize learning and prevent monotony. The excellent facilities contributed to a productive school day.

3. Instructional Methodology

The program was a diagnostic, prescriptive approach to reading instruction. Each learner was administered the comprehension section on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Level D, Form 1, to determine his entry reading level. The comprehension section was used because it measures one's ability to read for understanding which was the primary focus of this program. It also provided the instructors with a tool to prescribe learning activities commensurate with the reading level of each learner.

One instructional method used was the assisted reading approach. This approach has several characteristics:

a. The learner is asked to read complete sentences - not just words.

b. The sentence is read to the learner by the teacher who pronounces the words as the learner follows along running his fingers under the words.

c. Next, the learner tries to vocalize (read) words in the sentence/passage with the teacher supplying words that the learner cannot remember.

d. Finally, the learner rereads the sentence/passage for the teacher. (5)

Assisted reading lets the learner know how reading works and increases confidence as he is assisted in his own reading. Throughout the assisted reading methodology, the teacher strives to be supportive without building dependencies. Teachers constantly reassure the learner that he "did it" without help from anyone.

Oral and silent reading were also included in this program. The oral reading served both the teacher and the learner. The teacher could hear how the learner was attacking the words, and the learner could hear how the passage sounded as he read it. Silent reading allowed the learner to practice reading for comprehension.

Small group reading was used to reduce or eliminate stress. Each learner could follow the reading of others, while "evaluating" his own ability to read in relation to theirs. It was noticed that this approach caused a spirit of friendly competition to develop in the reading groups. Each member was apparently trying to read as well as or better than the others in his group.

Mini-lessons (usually 10 to 15 minutes in length) were used to provide variety in instruction. Each shift in lesson caused a need to define "why" we were doing this, relating the "need" for doing it, and relating it to "previous activities" so that the Gestalt could be internalized. Teachers must avoid sudden shifts in instruction with adult learners unless the continuity and need are established.

At the close of each lesson, the objectives were repeated, specific ideas learned were explained, and all ideas were related to the reading process. Questioning strategies were also used to evaluate and promote understanding.

4. Reading Skills Taught

The following list includes the reading skills taught in the reading improvement program:

- Forming compound words
- Forming plurals
- Forming contractions
- Identifying root words
- Identifying prefixes and suffixes
- Recognizing Homonyms/Synonyms
- Discovering context
- Finding main idea
- Recalling details
- Using an index
- Predicting outcomes
- Identifying cause and effect
- Practicing dictionary skills
- Inferring
- Drawing conclusions
- Reading in context
- Locating answers
- Following directions
- Following sequences
- Using tables and graphs
- Reading a map

5. Instructional Materials Utilized

The materials used in the program were limited to print only and consisted of two types: commercial and community. An example of the commercially-prepared materials is:

Specific Skill Series
"Detecting the Sequence"
Barnell Loft, Ltd.
Baldwin, New York

This set of materials uses a series of short reading passages and multiple choice questions to teach the learner how to determine the sequence of events that occur within a passage. A detailed listing of all commercially-prepared materials used in the program is provided as Appendix 1.

The community based materials included The Commercial Appeal (the local Memphis newspaper), maps of the Memphis area, credit applications from local agencies, and forms that the learners normally use on their jobs.

Social security forms, promotional job applications, union membership forms, health forms, contracts, and newspaper stories related to everyday events in the lives of adults served to make the materials learner-centered. Crossword puzzles were another material used to develop vocabulary and learner relevance.

6. Staffing

Five volunteers comprised the staff for the reading improvement program. Four individuals served as instructors and one individual served as the associate program researcher. Two of the teaching staff were certified teachers with many years experience teaching adults. The other two teaching staff members were non-certified, but were Navy-trained instructors. The associate program researcher had many years experience in teaching, educational administration, and research methodology.

The staff exhibited the following characteristics:

a. respected their learners
b. rejected labeling and classifying their learners
c. were open to varied instructional strategies
d. helped the learner establish success
e. made excellent use of non-verbal cues from learners
f. used eye contact and gestures to emphasize points of difficulty
g. were aware of the characteristics of adult, disadvantaged learners.

Additionally, the staff had a knowledge of the reading process, were sensitive to the psychology of adult learning, and had a working knowledge of the social context of literacy. These characteristics are essential for all who work with adults. Exhibiting these characteristics promotes harmonious relationships between teachers and learners and fosters learning.

7. Program Evaluation

Standardized instruments, interviews, questionnaires, and observations were used to gather data about the program and its participants. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Level D, Form 1, was the standardized instrument used to measure reading grade level. The comprehension section of this test consists of forty-three items using a multiple choice pattern for response. The test has a reliability coefficient of .88 to .94 for alternate forms using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20. Validity measures for the test were established using inferential and literal reading passages suitable for the interests of both younger and older students. (6)

Interviews were conducted with each learner to obtain demographic information and to obtain his feelings about the program. Questionnaires provided information on self-esteem, attitudes toward the program and the instructors, and attitudes about reading. The observations yielded antecdotal information regarding learner relationships, facilities, and program elements.

FINDINGS

A series of program findings are listed and discussed below:

1. The learners had physiological disorders that impacted negatively on their learning.

Ten individuals displayed symptoms of inability to see letters and words unless they were written in large, bold print. Others complained of watering eyes and headaches after working a short while at the reading assignments. These people were taken to the clinic for an eye examination that revealed a need for eye glasses in six of the ten cases. The medical personnel at

the clinic suggested that they contact their own optometrists to verify the findings and to obtain prescriptions for eye glasses.

Several individuals demonstrated a problem of discriminating between the sounds. For example, the non-reading group had difficulty with the "b" as in boy and "d" as in dog. Consonant blends such as "gr" and "br" were equally difficult for them. These problems are characteristic of learners who have some hearing loss. This factor has important implications for instructional program which center on a phonetic approach to beginning reading. In order to learn to read using a phonetic approach, one must be able to discriminate between sounds.

Additionally, physiological problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure and arthritis with their accompanying medications made frequent breaks necessary for student comfort and alertness. The nutritious, well-balanced meals provided by the Navy augmented the learning process and, in some cases, served as stabilizers for the different medical disorders.

2. The attention span of the learners was very short.

In most learning situations, a person is expected to attend to a task and to stay with it for an extended period of time. However, the adults in the reading improvement program had very short attention spans. Mini-lessons or activities of ten to fifteen minutes became the norm. The mini-lessons did not require elaborate preparation or even major deviation from the lesson topic, but they had to have the variety to help the learners attend to the task. A reading passage could be read for sequence of ideas, scrutinized for new vocabulary, searched for compound words, and finally, discussed by the group for the main idea.

This finding has implications for teacher selection when the intensive training model is transported to other settings because the teacher must have sufficient experience to read the non-verbal cues (and sometimes verbal ones) of the learner and to adjust the activity.

3. The choice of subject matter and the visual and spatial design of instructional materials must be carefully selected for the adult learner.

The materials which had larger print, wider spacing of words and letters and some color helped to stimulate these adult learners because they had less difficulty reading them. For example, the grocery advertisements were much easier to read and understand than were other portions of the newspaper simply because they use larger print with words spaced farther apart.

Stories, books, pamphlets and newspaper articles are excellent instructional materials, but they have to be screened for adult interest and relevance. Those stories in which adults

can see themselves or, perhaps, their children or grandchildren, in real life situations are more meaningful and interesting than are those in which they cannot find real life.

4. Few reading materials are available in the homes of the adult learners.

Interviews with the participants found that there were few reading materials available in the home. It appears that this is tied to both economics and education. Many indicated the cost of printed materials was prohibitive, while others did not clearly understand how to subscribe to magazines. Educationally, the individuals saw little need for printed materials because they did not read well.

It should be pointed out that the books, dictionaries, newspapers and other community resource materials were taken home each evening by the learners. It appears that these materials had some symbolic value, indicating to their families, friends, and neighbors that "I am attending school," or "This is my homework." Whatever the reason, the resources went home each evening.

5. Instructional personnel must move the adult learner from a dependency relationship to a more self-reliant one in order to foster his learning.

Early in the reading program, the adult learners were not accustomed to the daily routine of the classroom nor were they completely secure with the instructors and the school facilities. This caused them to be very dependent. It took a day or two for the learners to become acclimated to their new environment before they could give full concentration to the learning process.

Future program initiatives must expect these early behaviors, and time should be allocated to walk the learners through each program element very carefully. As familiarity and confidence develops, the adult learners become more self-reliant, knowing, and secure.

6. An esprit de corps developed within the group.

Because of their travel arrangements, eating arrangements, and classroom structures, the group developed a cohesiveness that inspired enthusiasm and zeal to do well with each activity. An example of this zeal was the acceptance of peer tutoring as an instructional method. After the peer tutoring sessions, those individuals who needed assistance would often ask their classmates for help without displaying any negative feelings or apprehension.

7. The adult learners wanted instruction in writing and spelling as well as in reading.

The lack of ability to spell and to construct complete sentences frustrated the learners who could read and understand the passages, but who were unable to express themselves in writing. Their desires for instruction in other basic skills were expressed on the questionnaires, through questions to the teachers, and through questions to the Adult Basic Education specialist when he met with the group concerning the availability of follow-on classes.

8. The learners expressed a desire to continue their learning.

To accommodate the desire for continued instruction which was expressed by the learners, a representative from the Memphis City Schools Adult Basic Education Program was invited to meet with the group and to talk with them about follow-on classes. The representative concentrated his efforts on location of follow-on classes, meeting times for them, and registration of the group. Fifteen of the sixteen people completed application forms for follow-on classes in the ABE program.

9. The Navy's Academic Remedial Training (ART) program can be modified for use as an intensive instructional reading program with adults.

The data strongly supports the concept that the Navy's Academic Remedial Training (ART) program which uses an intensive approach to reading instruction can be modified to accommodate adults from the local community. Statistically, the results obtained from this pilot program were significant in that those learners who scored between 2.5 and 4.5 on the pretest using the Gates-MacGinitie increased their reading grade levels 3.3 on the average.

The Wilcoxon Matched-pairs Signed Rank Test was a statistical procedure applied to the data to indicate direction. These data, shown in Table 2, also confirm the concept that the increase in reading grade level appears to indicate true differences between pretest and posttest scores. The signed rank difference shows that 11 scores increased from pretest to posttest, 4 scores declined, and one remained the same. These results can safely be attributed to the teaching-learning experience.

Although these statistical procedures clearly indicated programmatic success, one is cautioned about inferring too much because the sample was very small. If these results are upheld with repeated program trials, then confidence about the program will be bolstered.

10. The reading improvement program promoted self-esteem for the learners.

At the completion of the program the learners were demonstrating a higher degree of self-worth and self-esteem. The program apparently gave them confidence in themselves and made them feel important to their friends and family.

TABLE 2

WILCOXON MATCHED PAIRS
SIGNED RANKS TEST

Learner	Pretest Scores	Posttest Scores	Sign	D	RD
1	2	4	+	2	3.5
2	7	2	-	5	8.5
3	0	6	+	6	10.
4	3	7	+	4	6.5
5	2	0	-	2	3.5
6	4	5	+	1	1.
7	21	33	+	12	11.
8	5	0	-	5	8.5
9	0	2	+	2	3.5
10	1	1	0	0	0
11	3	7	+	4	6.5
12	21	36	+	15	14.
13	17	33	+	16	15.
14	13	26	+	13	12.5
15	20	33	+	13	12.5
16	2	0	-	2	3.5

Probability = 24

Each learner became less sensitive about his limitations in reading and more confident in his ability. Often the learner would remark, "Don't tell me; I'll get it.", then he would proceed to pronounce the word or answer the question.

As their self-worth increased, many of the learners began to display self-confidence that was not visible at the beginning of the program. They would volunteer for new assignments, suggest that two or three could work together on a project, and/or volunteer to perform tasks at the chalkboards.

Perhaps, self-esteem was promoted because the individuals were made to feel as essential partners in piloting the reading program. It may have prompted a sense of commitment that would not have developed otherwise. Perhaps, their horizons were broadened by learning about Navy schools, Navy people and "meeting the media and a real admiral." Whatever the reasons, forthcoming programs should strive to reach a plateau where self-esteem develops.

11. The learners displayed a positive feeling about their instructors.

After overcoming some hesitancy about the teachers and some embarrassment from not being able to read well, a more relaxed atmosphere developed in the classrooms. Learners began to share personal experiences encountered because of their inability to read. They increased their interaction with the staff, often providing insight as to what caused them to leave school initially.

Using frequency of response as a cue toward feeling good in the classroom, it was apparent that the instructors had done their job. Learners were constantly remaining during the break time to ask one more question or share one more example.

12. The learners developed a positive attitude toward reading.

The learner responses to the questionnaire indicated that they had gained an appreciation for learning and the reading process. Responses to the following statements were the data used to formulate this finding:

"I plan on reading more since I have gone to this school."

"I want to read more since I have come to this reading program."

"I liked the stories/articles I read."

CONCLUSION

Based on the previously described program using older civilians, instead of young, adult military personnel, the

Navy's intensive immersion approach for the development of reading skills will work in a civilian setting with many individuals benefiting. The intensive approach appears to effectively and dramatically increase reading grade level scores for people who possess some initial reading skills.

The Reading Improvement Program offers two distinct advantages that help make it another valuable adult education resource for Memphis and Shelby County:

1. The program offers the opportunity to create community partnerships between funding agencies, service delivery agencies, and service recipients; partnerships combatting illiteracy.

2. This instructional approach builds a sense of pride and accomplishment among the participants as they progress at their own pace. This quality should carry over into their everyday lives making them more effective and productive citizens.

Boone and others reinforce the conclusion that an intensive program of instruction using approximately 32 hours per week will produce dramatic results. (7)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal recommendation of study is that a second test of the Navy's Academic Remedial Training (ART) modification be conducted using a defined target audience. The individuals who comprise the second test should read in the 3.0 to 5.9 reading grade level range. This will require testing of the individuals prior to beginning instruction to ensure that they meet the criterion.

A second recommendation should be made about exporting the model to businesses and industries. When they adopt the model for their use, they should purchase new up-to-date adult reading materials because they will not have any materials on hand. We had these materials because of existing Navy reading programs. When businesses and industries purchase materials, they should review the market and purchase those materials that have been specifically designed for adults.

All adult reading initiatives should incorporate the use of community and job related forms and materials wherever possible because they create a functional context for learning that helps the learner make an immediate transfer of the reading skills to job proficiency and personal advancement. Stitch mentioned that when reading was taught in the functional context or performance-oriented mode, "there is more than twice the gain than in reading general literacy materials." (8)

It is further recommended that the Memphis Literacy Coalition seek funding to establish a three-person extension staff who would act as agents for the coalition and interested

community groups for implementing an intensive, immersion reading program.

For example, the extension staff in their roles of literacy extension agents could perform the following actions in support of the concept:

a. Prepare a division of Memphis and Shelby County area into neighborhood areas for working purposes.

b. Establish volunteer advisory committees from business, industry, clergy, and education to help build the program.

c. Enlist the help of community youth groups (Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Church groups) to assist identifying and recruiting people.

d. Obtain teachers from volunteers or paid by adult education programs and conduct teacher training.

e. Conduct the classes where the needs of the target group can best be met, e.g., churches, fire stations, schools, businesses.

f. Integrate the reading improvement program with community education programs.

The extension model minimizes the lack of transportation, child care, and family support which are the reasons most often given for not attending literacy or adult education programs. Articulation with community service and existing educational programs permits all family members to become involved in an educational experience.

The model also builds upon people helping people. When concerned citizens reach out to help their neighbors, good things happen.

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APPENDIX 1

List of Curricular Materials

1. Multi-Read Kit #2
   Science Research Associates, Inc.

2. Dimensions: Manpower and Natural Resources
   Science Research Associates, Inc.

3. Dimensions: We Are Black
   Science Research Associates, Inc.

4. Instructional Aid Packets
   Prefixes, Suffixes, Root Words
   Dexter and Westbrook Ltd.

5. Spelling Skills Series
   Barnell Loft Ltd.

6. Specific Skills Series
   Barnell Loft Ltd.

7. Individualized Reading Skills Program
   Houghton Mifflin Company

8. Honeycomb (Basal Readers)
   Houghton Mifflin Company

9. The Commercial Appeal

10. Memphis City and County Maps

11. City of Memphis Credit Union Applications

12. Local loan application forms

13. AFSCME grievance reports

14. City of Memphis Job Announcements and Promotion Applications

15. Library Card Applications

16. Challenger Reading Series
    New Readers Press

ESTIMATED COSTS

Personnel	
(1) Lead Teacher $10/hr x 8 hrs/day x 10 days	$800.00
(2) Assistant Teacher $7/hr x 8 hrs/day x 10 days	560.00
Materials Based on 20 per class	1200.00
Supplies Expendable, $5.00/participant Paper Chalk Notebooks Pencils	100.00
Meals	1600.00
Breakfast 3.00 per day x 10 x 20 participants	600.00
Lunch 5.00 per day x 10 x 20	1000.00
Initial Costs $213 per participant	4260.00
Recurring Cost	3060.00